

# New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

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*Chair: Peter Burling*

*Vice Chair: Katherine Hersh*

## **Minutes**

**January 28, 2011**

**10:00 am**

**LOB 201**

Present: Chair Peter Burling, Vice-Chair Kathy Hersh, Mark Brewer, Kerrie Diers, David Preece, Mike Izbicki, Jay Minkarah, Kit Morgan, Representative Allen, Thomas Mahon, Tim Moore, Steve Pesci, Ted Starkweather, Mike Tardiff, Malcolm Taylor

**I. Call to Order** – Chair Burling called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

### **II. Discussion – HB 218**

Chair Burling opened the discussion about HB218, which proposes to repeal the NHRTA. The hearing is scheduled for next Tuesday, February 1, and those who would like to testify should make the most of the opportunity. After the hearing opens, there will first be a presentation by the sponsors. Chair Burling suggested that anyone desiring to testify should also include a 1 page written testimony in addition to oral testimony. He also suggested that testimony be specific from your regions, municipalities, and cite issues particular to your regions. We are on the advent of a critical planning process that we raised the funding for. Abolishing the NHRTA would have immediate negative impacts. This is entirely a political event, and it is totally within reason to call representatives and emphasize economic impact of rail. It's good to have materials for handouts. Rep. Allen made a suggestion to come early, and fill out pink card if you want to speak. Rep. Allen announced that she has been asked to step down from the NHRTA. Since Rep. Allen is on finance, they feel a better representative would be from the Transportation Committee. She suggested that the Rail Authority emphasize that we are not receiving any funding from the state.

Chair Burling expressed his regret to hear this news. We have appreciated your tremendous support. Thank you. We will always welcome you back to the table.

Anyone who plans to attend the hearing is welcome to get together at 11:30 in the cafeteria on Tuesday. It would be helpful to organize the presentations, as there is a limited amount of attention. Each person should present something different.

Chair Burling will coordinate with the press, press room, and editors of newspapers. In 3 years, the 28 members of this authority have worked as volunteers to fulfill the direction of the original statute. We filed grants, received \$1.4 million in grant funds, worked closely with NH DOT and we stand at the threshold of the most important part of the project. We did that without spending any state money. Every expense of this agency has been paid for out of our

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own pockets and we have the support of many businesses and individuals who have supported funding our efforts. We have achieved this in the NH way, without a burden to the taxpayers and we are simply asking that we be permitted to continue what we were asked to do.

We should review membership on the Transportation Committee and call the Representatives if you know them. Let them know how important this is.

Kathy Hersh reported that Mayor Lozeau will be attending the hearing. Mike Izbicki stated that Bedford passed a resolution, and Tom Mahon reported that the resolution is on the Merrimack Council agenda for 2/10. Mike Izbicki will bring the map that shows the “doughnut hole” and fact sheets.

Jay Minkarah stated that Rep. Allen made a good point, that no state funds support the rail authority, and nor are we seeking operating funds for this authority. Any efforts we have made have been sponsored privately. Rail transit is happening in this state and region and abolishing the planning and coordinating entity doesn’t negate the need.

Peter Burling emphasized that the future of the economic engine that is Manchester Airport is on the line. There are long term economic impacts of not connecting the airport with rail. Another big consequence of not focusing on improving the rail system is the Bow power plant and the freight that needs to reach it. We do not have the highway infrastructure to handle bringing fuel to that plant alone. If we don’t have rail infrastructure to handle this, there will be significant impacts to the ratepayers of the state.

Doing away with the rail authority sends a message to the federal government that NH has no interest in rail. Steve Pesci stated that federal grants require a demonstration of state support, and the showing of that in NH is the Authority.

Kit stated that the commissioner is planning to be there to emphasize the things that the DOT cannot do without the authority, and what the rail authority needs to do. The public debate format is gone without the authority.

David Preece stated that Commissioner Campbell is seen as very supportive of rail. Prior to his tenure, there was little support for rail from the NHDOT. Now it is an economic development issue. NH is the fastest growing state in the Northeast, a rapidly aging state, and studies show that both those aging and the “Gen Y” populations want more public transportation. This is a need not a want. We need to emphasize that without young people in the State we are less economically competitive. We need to have access to transportation other than cars, especially with gas prices rising to \$4 per year.

Tim Moore stated that all transportation systems are subsidized in some form or another. This is not just a southern NH issue. 75-80% of the population of the state wants rail and could be served within 10 years. We need a well-integrated transportation plan in the state. It’s not

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going to be very long before people realize they can take the train to ski areas. If we don't keep up with other states, there will be a severe negative impact.

Tom Mahon pointed out that there will be serious impacts on different transportation sectors. If there is a well-integrated transportation system, everyone benefits and it strengthens our economy.

Mike Izbicki asked Mark Brewer if he has heard the reports from the Connecticut Transportation Commissioner that the double tracking between Hartford and Springfield has increased airport success.

Mark Brewer stated that without other public transportation options from the airport, we are only status quo moving forward, which hurts the growth of the airport overall. The elimination of NHRTA doesn't eliminate the need. It limits the options about who is speaking for this, which is a big loss. If there is not one specific entity concentrating on it, the message is diffused. Killing the rail authority does not kill the need for rail. Another broad issue that we should look at is that the NHRTA is perceived as the promoters of capitol corridor only. We need to emphasize our support for other corridors such as Plaistow and the Downeaster.

Steve Pesci stated that each speaker needs to emphasize that without a rail authority, "xyz" will happen in their area, and relate it back to why we need a rail authority. For example: UNH Manchester is looking at growth for commuter students. Steve has worked with NEPRA for years, but without a similar entity in NH, it is difficult to communicate and demonstrate public support. The NHRTA is a mechanism demonstrating public support. Steve suggested that you make your points and then relate what happens without an authority. We also need for NH DOT to emphasize why NHDOT values the NHRTA.

Malcolm Taylor thought that we should tie the emphasis on passenger rail to freight.

Kerrie Diers stated that the FTA and Federal Highway were conducting their Federal Review of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission and confirmed that NRPC's involvement in the authority is relevant and appropriate. We need to show that passenger rail is an important part of the mass transit infrastructure and we need to show it as an integral part of the system.

Chair Burling also stated that by upgrading passenger rail, we also upgrade freight rail.

III. **Public Input** -Chair Burling asked for members of the public to provide input – No public input.

## IV. Minutes

**Tim Moore moved to approve the minutes of December 17, 2010. The motion was seconded by Representative Allen. The motion passed unanimously.**

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## V. NH Capitol Corridor Updates

- a. **Schedule** – Kit Morgan stated that he did not have an updated schedule. We expect to have the notice on the website soliciting letters of interest for the FTA scope of work. The FTA is the first phase. The plan is to let everyone know what the total project is and do the Qualifications for the entire project, but the actual contract will for will only be on the FTA portion. Mike Izbicki asked if the NHRTA had to vote on anything regarding the scope? Kit stated that the first step is to post a notice to get letters of interest and qualifications, develop a short list of consultants and the scope at the same time. The letters are due after 30 days, there will be a 45 day period to review, develop short list of consultants and scope and then we would need to go to Governor and Council. In response to concerns expressed by the NHRTA, the NHDOT appointed a project manager to manage the consultant process. That project manager will take over the process and the Nashua and Manchester stations will be rolled into one project. The project manager at NHDOT will be Ronald Grandmaison. A short scope will be posted on the website shortly. Not certain when. Kit reported that he has submitted the scope to FTA for the grant, and the process will begin to move forward with finalizing the grant.
- b. **Match** - Kit asked for information from FRA regarding the eligibility of funding, but has received no response yet from FRA.
- c. **HB25 process amendment** - Peter is working to get that approved by Fiscal Committee

## VI. Outreach

- a. **Resolutions** – David Preece reached out to Alderman Dan O’Neil, but there is no current plan to bring it forward in Manchester. We will need to do more outreach and regroup. Mike Tardiff stated that he and Peter will go to Bow in February, and he meet with the Concord Mayor today.
- b. **Presentations** – Mike Izbicki spoke at the Leadership Greater Nashua program, and is speaking at the NRPC legislative forum.
- c. **UNH Study** – Steve Pesci discussed the 2 questions that will be in the upcoming Granite State Poll to gauge public support for rail service and to accept grant funds. Survey is underway now and we should have preliminary results as early as next week. David Preece stated that there was 87% support of commuter rail as part of regional plan survey. The PIRG study shows the way we fund and operate our highway system report released last night. Mike Izbicki talked to Mike Pillsbury and found out that the cost to maintain the average roadway is \$15,000 per mile.
- d. **Marketing** – Bill Lipfert and Mike Izbicki have been communicating and will meet next week to start working on this.

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**VII.State Rail Plan** – Kit Morgan stated that there is bad news and good news. The bad news was that the contract was held up at Attorney General's office and did not get on the January Executive Council agenda. The good news is that the project manager Ron O'Brien is here anyway and will talk about the scope, process and how NHRTA might participate.

Ron O'Brien reviewed the overview of NHRSP handout. Ron is looking for representatives from NHRTA to serve on the Technical Advisory Committee.

The State Rail Plan is looking at both passenger and freight rail across the state, and how the two fit together. The plan supports the fact that both work together and can be supportive of each other, they co-exist well when there is capacity to do so and will be looking at that.

Other aspects of the study will examine the rail system and infrastructure, rail transportation trends/commodity flow, economic development and how rail economic impacts economy, state initiatives and projects, strategies, benefits and costs, funding and financing, investments and benefits and what the state can get from investments, and findings and recommendations.

This will be a 12 month effort. They are ready to go as soon as the contract is approved and are hoping to get the go ahead this week.

Mike Izbicki stated that the outline looks good. How many members are on the committee, and who else would be on there? Ron stated that they anticipate that the railroads will have reps on there, key shippers, bus companies, and people that have an influence/interest in how it comes out. About 20 people are needed for good working sessions.

Steve Pesci said that these were ideas and suggested that they also get a rider representative from the Downeaster, and courtesy invitations for reps from neighboring state authorities, should also look at personal travel cost-benefit, and property tax issues around rail stations; Dover's Economic Development folks would be interested in that.

Mark Brewer asked for clarification on p 2 where it calls for rail infrastructure on #4 intermodality as it relates to economic development. Ron worked on the Massachusetts state rail plan which addresses this and is on line.

Malcolm Taylor offered historical context information. Ron said as it pertains to moving forward, that would be helpful. Historical context is good info – tables, etc. show travel times and what is possible based on past performance.

David Preece mentioned that northern NH timber industry is not globally competitive due to high transportation costs. If there were greater rail access, they would be more competitive.

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## VIII. Public Input

Tom Irwin asked if there will be an updated schedule? Kit Morgan answered that he will do that as needed. The goal is to get it done as soon as we can. The consultant selection process takes the longest amount of time

Mike Smith, from Finger Lakes Railway, is seeking support regarding heavy truck sizes and weights. Senators Leahy and Collins are introducing legislation to increase weight limits in Maine and VT. NH has a very high weight limit which has awful effect on railroads in Northern New England. The PIRG analysis is right on the mark. The feds tapped \$35 million general funds for highway. Looking for groups like this to support efforts against heavy trucks. Also agrees with expanding focus of NHRTA to include freight side. Passenger service is not feasible without freight lines.

David Preece asked if are they doing a fiscal analysis on the proposed legislation. Mike Smith said no, they are relying on anecdotal information and no economic analysis. This will impact state of NH.

Steve Pesci said that he hoped this can be touched upon in the state rail plan.

Barbara Pressly asked if people who are unable to attend the hearing next week are allowed to submit testimony. Kathy Hersh said she would submit letters to the Committee for those who forwarded them to her by email.

## IX. **Adjourn** – The meeting adjourned at 11:45 am

Respectfully Submitted

Kerrie Diers,  
NHRTA Secretary